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AUTHOR Monahan, Brian D.
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ABSTRACT

A recent article in the "Assemby for Computers in English (ACE) Newsletter" explains what most instructors of English already know--that students in most writing classes produce papers for which the primary purpose is the teacher. As the Internet becomes more widely available, students will have more access to what Howard Rheingold calls the "living database." Michael Day suggests that students can monitor discussion groups and determine the purpose and audience for which the group exists and then post messages to these groups. This activity gives students the opportunity to write for real purposes and real audiences. One recent item found on the Empire Internet schoolhouse might be of special interest to teachers of writing. The exercise is called "The Doomed Train." Its purpose is to give students experience in writing persuasive papers. Students get this experience by writing a paper and then a rebuttal to a student on the Internet who has an opposite view. There are any number of other opportunities whereby teachers can use Internet or e-mail to enhance the writing experiences of their students--word-processing is no longer the cutting edge in technology for the writing classroom. For instance, students can do research on the Internet. Also, creative writers can access CREWRT-L, a place where they can send their work to be critiqued. (Contains 12 references.) (TB)

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The Internet in English Language Arts

by

Brian D. Monahan

About the Author: Brian Monahan is the associate vice president for academic affairs at Iona College and a member of the faculty in the College's graduate program in educational computing. He is a former secondary school English teacher. Portions of this article formed the basis of a presentation at the 1994 NCTE Conference in Orlando. Brian has been an NCTE member for 19 years.

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In 1982, I wrote an article that appeared in English Journal. The main focus of that article was that teachers of English are entitled to their fair share of computer resources. In those days, that meant word processing. Today, I would make the same argument for Internet access. The purpose of this article is to describe activities for English teachers and their classes that justify that access.

Getting Connected

After reading this article you may say, "Okay, I'm convinced. But how do I get connected?" The first place to try is your own institution. If you are at a college or university, chances are quite good that you already have access. Check with the college's computer center. If you are at a college, you will probably be lucky enough to have a direct connection. That will usually mean that you have full Internet capabilities--sound, graphics, as well as text.

If you are not at a college, don't give up hope. In a K-12 school, check with the computer teacher or coordinator. It is especially likely that you will have access if your school is located in a large district or is part of a regional consortium. (In New York State many K-12 schools gain access through regional BOCES--the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services). Even if this level of access fails, don't despair. From their schools or their homes, people can access the Internet through on-line national information services such as Prodigy and Delphi. The limitation of this lower level of access is that it is currently

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only text-based. Yet, even with this level of access, one still has access to more information that could be read in several lifetimes. Major computer manufacturers, IBM, and Microsoft and Apple, have indicated that future versions of their software will provide the means for connecting to the Internet.

There are a number of guides that can help you take advantage of the Internet. Not surprisingly, many of them are available on the Internet itself. Two of my favorites are on Internet Bibliography (**1rg-14.txt**) and a guide to distance education (**de-online.txt**). To access them, go to the Institute for Academic Technology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To do so, FTP to **gandalf.iat.edu**. Then Login in as **anonymous** (no password). Type **cd guides**. Then type **get** and the filename you want. For those who wish to use a guide in a more traditional printed form, I recommend Paul Gilster's The Internet Navigator (1994). This book is a comprehensive beginner's guide that covers the concepts introduced in this paper, including email, telnet and ftp. It offers a special advantage in that the author gives his email address and willingly responds to questions from readers--at least he did to mine.

Some Minimal Background

There is a great deal of technical information about the Internet that users don't need to know. They don't need to know how the network was founded. (It was developed as a project called ARPANET that was sponsored by the Department of Defense in the late 60's. The purpose was to develop a system so the varied

machines of that time could talk to one another.) However, users will be interested to know that the same spirit that motivated the networks founders influences users today. Katie Hofner, who is writing a book on the founding of the network says, "The founders really wanted to share computer resources. It was a very democratic spirit. The spirit in which the network was built you can still see in the network today." (Kantrowitz, 58)

A Good Place To Get Started

If you are new to the Internet, you may want to subscribe to the newsletter for new users. It was created by Don Z'Boray who is a database manager in Texas and provides comprehensive coverage of getting around the network. To subscribe, send email to **newbienewz-request@IO.COM** containing the words **subscribe newbienewz** in the text.

There is also a free Internet training workshop available to anyone who wishes to subscribe. It covers email, gopher, veronica and other topics. To subscribe send email to **LISTSERV@UA1VM.UA.EDU** with the text of the message as: **SUB ROADMAP firstname lastname**.

An interesting and useful site to help new educational users learn quickly and easily about Internet K-12 resources in the "Empire Internet Schoolhouse." This is under the supervision of the New York State Education Department. It provides a wealth of information--including information on language arts--in a menu-driven, convenient way.

An example--and not directly from language arts--will

illustrate. A recent posting on the network was from a teacher in Rexford, New York that was looking to set up communications with a counterpart in another state so she could allow her students to share and compare information with fellow students on a project they were doing on insects. This type of activity gives students the opportunities to write for real purposes and audiences. The value of such writing opportunities if well documented in the National Council of Teachers of English literature. However, providing students with such opportunities is often difficult. Internet technology provides such an opportunity.

The Internet and the Writing Process

A recent article in the Assemby for Computers in English (ACE) Newsletter explains what we already know--that students in most writing classes produce papers for which the primary purpose is the teacher. As the Internet becomes more widely available, students will have more access to what Howard Rheingold calls the "living database." Day suggests that students can monitor discussion groups and determine the purpose and audience for which the group exists and then post messages to these groups. This activity gives students the opportunity to write for real purposes and real audiences. (Day 1)

One recent item found on the Empire Internet Schoolhouse might be of special interest to teachers of writing. The exercise is called "The Doomed Train." Its purpose is to give students experience in writing persuasive papers. Students get

this experience to do this by writing a paper and then a rebuttal to a student on the Internet who has an opposite view. The project coordinator, Francis Achic, can be reached at **francisa@kalama.doe.hawaii.edu**. He set up four teams in his school to deal with the question of, "Should Bosnia Hersegovina remain a confederation or be divided into Croat, Muslim and Serb sections." This was an interdisciplinary project among English and Social Studies classes. The students were grouped and each group adopted the views of a different ethnic group. Then the challenge was put out on the Internet and others could argue against any group. A similar--though less controversial--project which involved sharing information about cities in fourth grade classes was set up by Nancy Kreloff (**Kreloff@wb.ncook.k12.it.us**). She sought out other teachers and classes with whom she could share information of a more general nature.

Or, how about this activity took place at the Holmes Elementary School in Nebraska. Participants traded information on local prices with students in Europe. That activity formed the basis of a larger research project that used other more traditional media. This project is just one example that as a tool, the Internet can "turn students on" to research. As Jerry Shedlosky of the Holmes Elementary School in Lincoln, Nebraska says, "{The Internet} whets their appetites for research, and they start wondering what's in the library. It encourages traditional research and they end up going to the library spontaneously." (Miller 34)

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A recent article by Philip Elmer-Dewitt in Time magazine suggests another of the implications that the network has for writing. Dewitt points out that most journalism is topdown. There is a small number of writers who write for a large number of readers. With the Internet, that changes. On the network, news is gathered from the bottom up--many speaking to many. As Elmer-Dewitt says, "It bears the seeds of revolutionary change" (51). Clearly, since it will change the way people write, it should change the way that we teach writing.

Also on the topic of journalism we note that the letter to the editor has changed. Our local Gannett paper in metropolitan New York accepts "letters to the editor" via email now. You can even write to the editor of Newsweek, at George Hackett. His email address is **GHACKETT2NEWSWEEK.COM**.

Creative Writing

There are also opportunities for creative writing on the Internet. One place of special interest to creative writers and their teachers is **CREWRT-L**. It is, as Liz McMillen describes it, an on-line salon for creative writers (27). It is a place where students can send in their work to have it critiqued and teachers can share materials and ideas. To subscribe, send a message to **LISTSERVE2MIZZOUI.MISSOURI.EDU** saying: subscribe **CREWRT-L**. Those on the list call one another **CREWTONS**. The group is putting together an anthology of the work of its members. It is called, "Tender is the Net."

Research

As a research opportunity, imagine this. A student is doing a project on the 60's (a relatively commonplace junior/senior high school research project). In addition to simply using the standard book and periodical articles on the topic, the student can also sign on to the list called **SIXTIES-L**. The founder of the list, Kali Tal, created it as a place for young scholars to work. (Heller A28) To subscribe, send a message to **LISTPROC@JEFFERSON.VILLAGE.VIRGINIA.EDU**. The text of the message should say **SUBSCRIBE SIXTIES-L your name**.

The Internet provides research opportunities to teachers, as well as to students. Access to ERIC is one of the most valuable resources available on the network for teachers and sometimes for students. ERIC (Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse) includes information from educational journals and other documents of interest to educators. Searches are easy. You might do a search for all materials that use the keywords English and Internet. You'll find 400 citations which you can narrow down by adding additional keywords. Such a technique was part of the research for this article.

Lists

English teachers and others will find E-Mail lists to be among the most valuable resources on the Internet and the related Bitnet network. We have already discussed several. CREWRT-L, ROADMAP and NEWBIENZ are all lists. One major accomplishment for a novice network user is to learn to subscribe to email lists. To do so, once you have located the list, you send email

addressed to: **listserv@address**. You do not include a subject. Then put a one line message that says: **SUBSCRIBE LISTNAME YOUR NAME**. So, to subscribe to the Canadian Adult Education List you would send the subscribe message to: **listserv@ureginal.bitnet**. (You don't use the bitnet suffix if you are already on bitnet.) Then the first line of the message is: **SUBSCRIBE ADLTED-L (your name)**. It doesn't matter in this case whether you use last name or first name first.

There are two types of electronic bulletin boards on the Internet, as explained by Daniel Brady (4). The lists which we have just discussed are one type. They allow people to send messages of interest to a central location where they are collected and then sent as a package to interested subscribers. The other type is the **USENET** newsgroup. On it, once again, users post messages to a central location where users access them. These usenet lists are much easier to access. Once you have an Internet account with **USENET** access, the process is straightforward and can be done with virtually no instruction.

Limitation of Access/Concerns About Pornography

Bruce Flanders has reported that limitation or denial of student access to the Internet is prevalent. Those of us who have always been concerned about censorship may have an immediately negative reaction to this limitation, but there is real concern. Through the alt.sex USENET groups it is possible to gain access to materials that might shock even the most sophisticated among us. Through some of the FTP (File Transfer

Protocol) file sites, it is possible to download files that are inappropriate for students--and maybe for their teachers.

It is interesting that most of the librarians with whom I have spoken are adamant that students should have virtually unlimited access to the network. It may be that librarians are used to facing such crises and tend to err on the side of access rather than restriction. Librarians have already had to deal with monitoring how and when young people access information that is already in the collection. They have even managed to monitor eating, drinking and talking in the library--monitoring use of the Internet should be no problem. As Flanders points out, librarians are survivors (41). Of course, school districts want to avoid lawsuits and avoid actions that go directly against the wishes of parents. One method of control that seems reasonable is to require parental permission for students to access the Internet (Grant 33). Parents seem to have no problem granting this permission.

Another method which some schools have used to monitor access is the use of "smartcards." These cards record on-line sessions. While they do not prevent a student from accessing a particular site, they do let school officials know where the student has been.

There are other potential risks beyond access to inappropriate information. One work that is available on the Internet is the "School Stopper's Textbook." It covers topics such as short circuiting the school's electrical wiring and

setting off explosives in the school's plumbing (Bates 22).

Limiting user access to any of this information is nearly impossible. Even if a particular site does not subscribe to certain discussion groups, an enterprising user can find a way to them, even if it means having information sent by email. In fact, many students would welcome the challenge.

Professional Development

One professor at East Carolina University says she plans to print out all of the complimentary messages she has received when she applies for promotion (DeLoughy 25). More and more, educators are seeking credit for the professional work they do on-line. Most of that work, of course, deals with the improvement of instruction. While there is value in teaching students to use the Internet for its own sake, as with all tools, the Internet's greatest value can be found when it is taught in a useful curriculum context. One of the most effective ways of doing that is by discussing the possibilities with other professionals.

The role of the Internet goes beyond career advancement and research. Teaching is a lonely profession. Opportunities for stimulating conversations with colleagues are often difficult to find. Internet connection can provide numerous opportunities for such discussion. For example, ACE's own Robert Royar serves as moderator of the Computers and Composition Digest, a human-moderated electronic digest. This list provides a forum for lively discussion of issues related to the teaching of

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composition. The value of the forum has already been well documented in the ACE newsletter. To subscribe to the digest send a message to **r0mill01@ulkyvx.bitnet** (note that those are zeroes). The message should be "Subscribe" or "Subscription Request." In the body of the message include your real name and a return address in Bitnet or Internet format.

Some other places to go

From your Internet site you'll find that Telnet is one of the options available to you. Telneting basically lets you access another computer as if you were there. As an English teacher, one of my favorite places to be is the network site which is operated by the Carey School of Education at the University of Virginia. You can telnet there (**state.virginia.edu**). Then log in with gopher. One of the more interesting things teachers will find there is a special new forum on language arts that is being maintained by Jan Stuhlmann. You will get a menu there and the forum is one of the choices from it.

Of course, English teachers have a special interest in libraries and there is no better place to visit them than on the Internet. You can telnet to **library.dartmouth.edu** and browse through the collection. In most cases, it isn't even necessary to telnet since access to most libraries is available from gopher menus. From your connection, you are likely to see a choice All the Gopher Servers in the World. Once you are there, you can visit libraries at most institutions and browse the card catalogs

and other services (such as ERIC) that they might offer. Or, you can visit the library of all libraries--the Library of Congress. Telnet to **locis.loc.gov.** When you get there, type "help" to learn about the different ways you can search those databases.

Finally, if you are having a bad day, you can always use the Internet to look for another job. It is possible to access career postings at a variety of university sites and it is also easy to gain access to the Chronicle of Higher Education's job listings. You can reach the Chronicle at a variety of gopher sites or telnet there directly to **chronicle.merit.edu**. Once there, you can do a search through the hundreds of job listings using keywords such as "English" or "composition."

There is little question that the Internet has exciting implications for those of us who teach English and, especially, writing. All of my experience suggests that we are ready and anxious to accept the challenges that are coming to us.

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